

Headline: Adoption day brings families together

By Ingrid Langsather

In an effort to celebrate and encourage adoptions, Jackson County participated in the first Michigan Adoption Day on November 25.

The families officially brought together that Wednesday afternoon had a lot to be thankful for—just in time for the holidays. Smiles and tears of joy were prevalent throughout the afternoon.

The statewide event, which featured adoptions of about 250 children in Michigan and 12 in Jackson County, was sponsored jointly by the Michigan Supreme Court and the Family Independence Agency (FIA).

Adoption hearings began early afternoon in Judge Susan Vandercook's courtroom at the Jackson County Probate Court. Vandercook was dressed for the occasion with her formal robes embroidered with giraffes, kangaroos and monkeys.

In Michigan, there are about 19,500 children in foster care programs and about 4,500 permanent state wards with a goal of adoption. Most of the children have an adoptive home identified, but there are still around 400 who do not. The FIA helped finalize 2,833 adoptions in Michigan in 2002 and is seeking adoptive homes for these children.

Chief Judge William Whitbeck, from the Michigan Court of Appeals, joined Vandercook in her courtroom during the adoption hearings and spoke to each of the adoptive families.

Vandercook, who handles cases within the family division of the 4th judicial circuit court, recognized that the adoptions taking place were a happy occasion. Whitbeck echoed this sentiment by saying that while "most people associate court with bad things, adoption is a uniformly good thing for everyone involved."

Nathan Allen and Richard (Richie) Leo, the first children adopted that afternoon, became an official part of the Haislip family after Vandercook signed the order of adoption. The Haislips have had Richie, 18 months, in foster care from birth and Nathan, 3 years old, from the time he was six months old.

The boys' mother was a cousin of the family and lost control over her children to the Family Independence Agency due to neglect and abuse.

The whole family said they have been looking forward to this moment for a long time.

Seven years ago, Diane Clay from Jackson adopted her first child. Today, she has five adopted children through Lutheran Social Services of Michigan. Since Vandercook had handled all of her adoptions, Clay had been invited to the event to encourage new adoptive parents and show support for Adoption Day.

"It has been very rewarding," Clay said. "If I had the opportunity, I would do it over again.

"The children have been an inspiration to me. In fact, I decided to go back to college."

Clay has had foster children for the past 11 and a half years. Over the years, she said that her two older biological sons, Charles and Erin, have greatly helped her.

Two women present shared their experiences with international adoption. Sherry Eva decided to adopt Sheela as a single mother. Originally from India, Sheela was seven years old when adopted by Eva.

The process of adopting a child from overseas takes patience, according to Eva. "It took two years just to get her out of the country," said Eva.

Since 1999, Sheela has adjusted well to life in a new country, learned a completely new language and has enjoyed being part of a loving family. Eva, who has recently been married, said that her husband is in the process of adopting Sheela.

"There are so many children, both here and internationally who need a loving home," Eva said.

Trina Morrissey has had a similar experience with her daughter Audrea, who she adopted from China a year ago. Morrissey said that she and her husband flew to China with four other couples, accompanied by a translator, and were able to visit the orphanage where Audrea had lived.

Morrissey's sister, Terralyn Brown, is the adoption coordinator for the circuit court of Jackson. Brown helped coordinate the majority of the adoptions that occurred on Adoption Day.

"It's been a great experience. Audrea is wonderful and doing so well," said Morrissey.

During the afternoon of adoptions, an adult adoption—a rare occasion—took place. In this case, a 20 year old woman, Alesha Collins, was expecting a child and wanted to be officially adopted by her step-father so that her baby would be brought into a complete family. While her step-father Donald had helped raise her for the last 13 years, he and Alicia's mother Susan had not yet been married. Consequently, in order for the adoption to take place, they had to first get married.

"It is appropriate this is two days before Thanksgiving," said Whitbeck during the adoption procedure.

Adoption coordinator Brown said that she had worked with this family and while they were apprehensive about the adoption procedure at first, everything went smoothly.

At a reception following the adoptions, Dawn, an 11 year old who was adopted when she was five years old, read a prepared statement about how her adoption has impacted her life. She stated that her birth mother did not want to take responsibility for her, but now she has found what it is to be loved by her new family.

"Adoption is knowing where I belong," she said.

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James and Yvonne Haislip of Jackson officially brought Richie and Nathan into their family by adopting them on Michigan Adoption Day last Tuesday.



Diane Clay has adopted five children over the past seven years through Lutheran Social Services of Michigan.



Trina Morrissey and her adopted daughter Audrea from China. Morrissey's sister Terralyn Brown is the adoption coordinator for the circuit court of Jackson.